

# EVALUATING THREE FRAMEWORKS OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING

James Nicholas Brennan V

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Approved by:

Erica Johnson

Graeme Robertson

Robert Jenkins

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## **ABSTRACT**

James Nicholas Brennan V: Evaluating Three Frameworks of  
Russian Foreign Policy Decision Making  
(Under the direction of Robert Jenkins)

This thesis presents three different models which can be used to analyze foreign policy decision making. These models are inspired by a spectrum of international relations theory, in particular realism, constructivism, and liberalism. In particular, this thesis applies each model to the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, in order to assess how well they explain different aspects of the conflict. In Chapter 2, I lay out the models in detail, and consider how the respective theoretical traditions inspire their makeup. I then apply each model to the 2008 war and consider several questions which allow an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of using each model to view the conflict. Finally, in Chapter 4, I consider the future implications for Russian foreign policy inherent in each model.

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## Introduction

State decision making can often be a murky process, especially in the sphere of foreign relations. For Russia, a country with a great deal of opacity, it is exceedingly difficult to parse out the influences behind state decisions. Where do different policy alternatives come from? Who decides which options are presented to upper echelon leadership? How do these leaders, in turn, go about deciding on a final course of action? In most cases, barring the release of heavily classified documents, there will never be definite answers to these questions.

How then can analysts evaluate foreign policy decisions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the varying viewpoints? These are the kinds of questions I hope to address in this thesis. My initial curiosity in the area of foreign policy decision making was spurred by Russia's seizing of Crimea in 2014 and continuing action aiding separatists in eastern Ukraine. Prominent scholars such as Michael McFaul, John Mearsheimer, and Alexander Motyl, writing essays in publications like the *New York Times* or *Foreign Affairs* magazine, have put forward a full spectrum of explanations for Russia's actions, ranging from calculated empire building to a fearful knee-jerk reaction to Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's deposition following the Euromaidan protests.<sup>1</sup> Rather than write about current events which have not yet run their

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<sup>1</sup> Such pieces include:

McFaul, Michael. "Confronting Putin's Russia." *The New York Times*, March 23, 2014. Accessed April 10, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/24/opinion/confronting-putins-russia.html>.

Mearsheimer, John. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77-89.

course, however, I will focus my attentions on another conflict between Russia and a critical neighboring country.

In this thesis, I seek to detail how different theoretical models drawn from International Relations theory, in particular realism, constructivism, and liberalism, answer the question of why Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, after which I will assess how well each model can explain the conflict. This question is not simply focused on why Russia entered into conflict with Georgia in this time period, but also, given the state of affairs, why did Russian troops advance so far into Georgia, yet not topple Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, rather than say simply pushing Georgian troops out of South Ossetia and setting up a buffer zone. Some of the possible answers to this question may appear valid from each perspective.

For example, one conclusion common to each viewpoint is that Russia, in whole or in part, entered the conflict in an attempt to decrease Western influence in Georgia. Why was Russia opposed to this influence? What were Russia's interests in keeping Georgia within its sphere of influence? Answers to such questions are unique to each framework, showing how quickly they diverge as one digs deeper. I refer to the models as the Rational Actor Model (RAM), the Honor-Respect Model (HRM), and the Governmental Process Model (GPM). My goals are to evaluate the usefulness of each model in explaining the conflict, see if there is one in particular which best accounts for the war, and finally to consider the future implications of each theory's explanation.

I have attempted to include contrasting perspectives of International Relations thought when deciding on which theoretical traditions to focus. In its final form, my analysis considers

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Motyl, Alexander. "Is Putin Rational?" *Foreign Affairs*. March 18, 2014. Accessed April 10, 2015. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141039/alexander-j-motyl/is-putin-rational>.

the theories of Realism, Constructivism, and Liberalism. These schools of thought within IR theory cover a spectrum of different views, which I will discuss more significantly in Chapter Two. To represent the perspectives of these different theoretical traditions, I use three different models, or frameworks. Although these models are initially developed in an abstract, theoretical sense, they are designed to be applicable to a wide range of events related to government decision making. I have drawn heavily from Graham Allison's work *Essence of Decision*, which I will also discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Two, for the basic formulas of these models

The body of this thesis contains four chapters. Chapter Two constructs the models I use in later chapters, in both an abstract theoretical sense, as well as in terms of how they apply to the Russian Federation in particular. This chapter also connects them to the schools of thought in International Relations theory they represent. Chapter Three begins with a short history of the Russo-Georgian conflict, then applies these models to the Russo-Georgian War, providing differing views of the conflict, and examining how different theoretical traditions would influence explanations of why the conflict occurred, and why it progressed the way it did, ending with an assessment of how well the models can explain the conflict, and what the pros and cons of such a view might be. Finally, Chapter Four details the future implications, inherent in each model, for foreign policy decisions of the Russian Federation.



## **The Models**

I have crafted the models listed above to represent three influential schools of thought in the study of international relations: Realism (RAM), Liberalism (GPM), and Constructivism (HRM). Although there are certainly other theoretical perspectives in the field of international relations, I am confident that these three views represent a wide spectrum of thought: one could imagine a spectrum, with materialism and structuralism on one end, and idealism and agency on the other. Realism would be on the materialist end, Constructivism on the idealist end, and Liberalism roughly in between.

The theoretical traditions from which I draw would all agree that states conduct foreign policy in order to further their interests. Where they disagree significantly, however, is over the question of how states decide what their interests are, and which interests to pursue. The three models I present can serve as theoretical explanations of this decision making process. I have adopted two of them, the RAM and the GPM, from political scientist Graham Allison. In his work, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Allison details several ways of explaining state decision making and develops analyses that utilize these methods of explanation.

Allison's work includes a third model, the Organizational Process Model, although it serves largely as a stepping stone between the Rational Actor Model and the Governmental Process Model, rather than fulfilling an especially unique role. In particular, the Organizational Process Model is not nearly as applicable to the highly centralized power structure of the Russian

state (upon which I will expand shortly) as it would be to more dispersed, bureaucratic power structures such as the United States. Although Allison's book only applies his models to Soviet and American decision making during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the models are intended to be useful for analyzing governmental decision making in a wide spectrum of situations.

The Rational Actor Model (RAM) derives from a realist view of international relations, in which states are viewed as unitary, rational actors who make the best possible decisions out of their various policy options. The overarching state interest predicted by this model would be survival. In most situations, states pursue wealth and power to ensure this objective. Although power as an abstract idea can have many different connotations, for the realist theorist, power would most often refer to military and defense capabilities, essentially those resources and situations which promote state survival. An analyst utilizing the RAM "focuses on certain concepts: goals and objectives of the nation or government," and makes predictions about a state's behavior "by calculating the rational thing to do in a certain situation, given specified objectives."<sup>2</sup> Thus, organizations and personalities do not factor highly into this model.

Allison was not the first to conceptualize foreign policy analysis in such a way, however. The idea of states as unified, rational actors has a long tradition in the field of international relations theory. Influential scholars such as Mearsheimer, Morgenthau, and Waltz have all written about the state in terms of a unified, rational actor. Most closely associated with the realist school of thought, the rational actor idea sought to explain that states are sensible and singular players on the world stage. Hans Morgenthau, one of the 'founding fathers' of realism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote that the rational nature of the state "provides for rational discipline

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<sup>2</sup> Allison, Graham T. *Essence of Decision; Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1971. p.5

in action and creates that astounding continuity in foreign policy which makes American, British, or Russian foreign policy appear as an intelligible, rational continuum, by and large consistent within itself.”<sup>3</sup> That is to say, regardless of the personal characteristics of the ever changing statesmen who navigate the country, the realist argument holds that a rational-actor state will always pursue its best interests in a logical way.

I should qualify the argument that states make rational decisions in their best interest by mentioning that the pursuit of best interests does not mean that states will not make mistakes in terms of their policy maneuvering. On the contrary, a rational actor state may frequently stumble in its decision making. What the RAM predicts, however, is that such a mistake would be the result of incorrect or insufficient information, rather than some sort of irrationality. This distinction is significant, as the other models will argue that mistakes may sometimes, if not often, be the result of decisions willfully made counter to the best interests of the state.

Similarly, this rational actor view argues that states can be considered as unified actors. Kenneth Waltz, another early developer of realist thought, argued that “as long as ‘some power in the state has so established itself that its decisions are accepted as the decisions of the state,’ the state can be treated as a unified actor with respect to other similar entities.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, a state can be viewed as a unified actor when its citizens, and other states, recognize its decision-making status.

To set up the RAM as a tool of decision analysis, there are five assumptions to make, based on the aforementioned realist ideas. First, the decision is the action of a state. Second, the

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<sup>3</sup> Morgenthau, Hans. "Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace." Six Principles of Political Realism. Accessed December 4, 2014. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/morg6.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Frankel, Benjamin. *Roots of Realism*. London: Frank Cass, 1996. p.71

state is a unified actor. Third, the state has a coherent goal. Fourth, the state acts in relation to threats and opportunities. Fifth, the state's action is value-maximizing. With these assumptions in mind, there are five questions to ask for a given situation. First, what are the state's goals? Second, what are the circumstances that the state conceives as threats and opportunities? Third, what are the options for addressing the issue? Fourth, what are the strategic costs and benefits of each option? Fifth, what is the best decision which will maximize the actor's objectives in the specified conditions? These assumptions and questions constitute the RAM in an abstract sense, which can be applied to a variety of policy making circumstances.

I now turn to how a realist model could be used to analyze Russian foreign policy decision making. As simplest of the three models to set up, in the RAM, an analyst would consider the official government of the Russian Federation, perhaps embodied in President Vladimir Putin, as a unified rational actor pursuing its own survival through the acquisition of state power and the wealth to finance such power. Placing oneself inside the mindset of this actor and considering both domestic and international events would then enable the analyst to explain or predict the best course of action. I will address the model's list of questions in Chapter Three, where I apply the model to the Russo-Georgian War in particular.

Not all theories of International Relations rely on the assumptions of perfectly rational action, or state survival as the fundamental state interest. The theoretical tradition of constructivism in international relations is an approach to analysis which challenges the assumptions about inherent material interests that sustain realism. For example, constructivist scholar Alexander Wendt argues in his widely cited article "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics" that states' "identities are the basis of interests. Actors do not have a 'portfolio' of interests that they carry around independent of social context;

instead they define their interests in the process of defining situations.”<sup>5</sup> Such arguments about the effects of identity on state interest are an important aspect of constructivism. In an overview of constructivism published in the *Annual Review of Political Science*, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink refer to the prominent edited volume *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* by Peter Katzenstein, in which several influential constructivist academics, such as Barnett, Berger, and Risse-Kappen, consider identity to be “mainly a domestic attribute arising from the national ideologies of collective distinctiveness and purpose that in turn shaped state’s perceptions of interest and thus state policy.”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, rather than taking interests such as wealth and power for granted, constructivism considers the specific states in question when determining the interests of said states. Thus, in the constructivist view, “military power, trade relations, international institutions or domestic preferences are not important because they are objective facts about the world, but rather because they have certain social meanings.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, a state’s collective perceptions “of friends and enemies, in-groups and outgroups, fairness and justice all become key determinant of a State’s behaviour.”<sup>8</sup> This reevaluation of state interest combines with a different conception of rational behavior to form the Honor-Respect Model.

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<sup>5</sup> Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make Of It: The Social Construction Of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425. p.398

<sup>6</sup> Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. "Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 391-416. p. 399

<sup>7</sup> Slaughter, Anne-Marie. "International Relations, Principal Theories." Accessed January 25, 2015. [https://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr/Articles/722\\_IntlRelPrincipalTheories\\_Slaughter\\_20110509zG.pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr/Articles/722_IntlRelPrincipalTheories_Slaughter_20110509zG.pdf) p.4

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

Constructivism also reconsiders realism's presumption of rationality. Max Weber's conception of value-rational action is important in the constructivist view. Value-rational action refers to a view in which, rather than all international actions being considered rational or irrational based solely on how well they increase wealth or power, actions are rationally committed for a norm or idea, even though the action may harm the actor in terms of other interests.<sup>9</sup> On an individual level, one example of value-rational action would be a captain going down with his or her ship. While the usefulness of the views of honor surrounding such a decision is debatable, the captain's action is still rationally decided. In Russia's case, identifying instances of value-rational decision making would mean analyzing foreign policy decisions and how they line up with the defense of Russia's reputation and status, rather than simply the traditional realist conception of security.

A sense of reputation is part of a state's honor. In his work *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*, Tsygankov argues that "the concept of honor is often at the heart of how a nation expresses its historical experience and formulates a moral purpose in world politics."<sup>10</sup> Thus, there may be instances where a state commits actions in the international arena out of a sense of moral purpose, or duty to close allies, rather than in the pursuit of clearly defined material interests, such as wealth or power.

Use of this model would entail considering the role honor plays in a given state's history, and then looking at the event in question with an eye towards examining the context that honor or reputation may have played in its occurrence. In Russia's case, the state's particularly long-

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<sup>9</sup> Kalberg, Stephen. "Max Weber's Types Of Rationality: Cornerstones For The Analysis Of Rationalization Processes In History." *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1145-179.

<sup>10</sup> Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012., p.20

established sense of prestige moves beyond the RAM's conceptions of state survival, as "[Russia's] honor myths reach back to its premodern foundations – Orthodox Christianity and its Slavic cultural inheritance – which predate the very system of nation-states on which realists base their analysis."<sup>11</sup> Considering the influence of honor and prestige on decision making does not preclude considering material interests as well, but it does necessitate balancing those interests against less tangible ones with an often extensive historical basis.

Setting up the HRM is extremely similar to the RAM, as both are unified actor models. One might even think of the HRM as a Value-Rational Actor Model, as compared to the Rational Actor Model. Thus, the list of initial assumptions and questions are the same. The answers to the list of questions are what set the HRM and RAM apart. From the HRM's view, the state's goals would be related to reputation and influence, rather than strictly security. Similarly, the state would perceive possible damage to its reputation as a significant threat, even if such circumstances might not have immediate security consequences.

Although it can certainly be useful for the purposes of simplification to talk about the aims and choices of unified state governments, this view of foreign policy decision leaves much to be desired. Particularly problematic is the assumption of a unified actor that "obscures the persistently neglected fact of government: the 'decision-maker' of state policy is obviously not one calculating individual but is rather a conglomerate of large organizations and political actors."<sup>12</sup> Thus, to speak about State A deciding to embark upon Project Z is to cover up an excruciating amount of political pulling and hauling that eventually led to this decision. The last theoretical tradition I include, Liberalism, attempts to account for these political processes.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>12</sup> Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p.3

In his frequently cited article “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” Andrew Moravcsik lays out a liberal theory of international relations which seeks to account for internal political dynamics.<sup>13</sup> Moravcsik’s theory is based on three core assumptions:

(i) individuals and private groups, not States, are the fundamental actors in world politics (*Non-State Actors*); (ii) States represent some dominant subset of domestic society, whose interests they serve; and (iii) the configuration of these preferences across the international system determines State behavior... In this view States are not simply ‘black boxes’ seeking to survive and prosper in an anarchic system. They are configurations of individual and group interests who then project those interests into the international system through a particular kind of government. Survival may very well remain a key goal. But commercial interests or ideological beliefs may also be important.<sup>14</sup>

Considering the deficiencies of the RAM and HRM, such a nuanced theoretical approach can help fill in the big picture. Although not influenced by Moravcsik’s theory (Allison wrote *Essence of Decision* decades before Moravcsik published his work), Allison conceived the Governmental Process Model (GPM) in an attempt to address the same shortcomings that led to Moravcsik’s theory. In the GPM, foreign policy decisions are “understood as a resultant of bargaining games among players in the national government.”<sup>15</sup> An analyst using this method focuses on “the players whose interest and actions impact the issue in question, the factors that

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<sup>13</sup> Moravcsik, Andrew. "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics." *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 513-53.

<sup>14</sup> Slaughter, “International Relations: Principal Theories”, p.3-4

<sup>15</sup> Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p.3



shape players' perceptions and stands, the established procedure or 'action channel' for aggregating competing preferences, and the performance of the players."<sup>16</sup> These foci essentially provide a roadmap to follow in terms of analysis. First, identify the players within the domestic power structure and the factors that shape their perceptions. Then, analyze the established procedure, or lack thereof, through which they compete for influence. And, finally, consider a case study of the players' performance. The use of the GPM for analyzing foreign policy is particularly applicable to Post-Soviet Russia because, as I will demonstrate, the preferences of informal narrow elites at the top of the governmental structure play a significant role in determining the direction of Russian foreign policy. It is the structure of these elites, and their foreign policy preferences, which must be considered in analyses of Russian foreign policy.

Allison's framework is not without its critics, however. One such critique comes in the form of a declassified CIA book review by Fritz Ermarth, former chairman of the National Intelligence Council. The problem he sees with Allison's non-Rational Actor models is that they, "along with other approaches focused on the inner workings of governments, are voracious consumers of detailed information. When that information is lacking, the models do not work well."<sup>17</sup> I would agree that creating a model of decision making other than the rational actor concept requires a great deal of information in order to correctly predict outcomes.

However, I would argue that thinking systematically about the type of political bargaining occurring at the policy making level serves as an important addition to simply putting

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ermarth, Fritz. "Book Reviews of *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Graham T. Allison and *Victims of Group Think* by Irving L. Janus." Central Intelligence Agency. August 4, 2011. Accessed December 4, 2014. [https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol18no1/html/v18i1a05p\\_0001.htm](https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol18no1/html/v18i1a05p_0001.htm).

oneself in the mind of the “Russian government” and thinking about what the most logical decision would be. Essentially, even in the absence of plentiful information, a model that takes a given state’s political structure into account can illuminate certain aspects of decision making, such as who influences the decision making process and what factors guide their perceptions, that might remain hidden when using the supposition that a state as a unified actor will necessarily choose the best, and most rational, course of action.

Finally, even if too much information is lacking to create an exceedingly accurate account of internal decision making, attempting to explain state behavior through the GPM can be useful through answering the additional questions that it raises. For example: who benefits from which decision? Who must give their agreement in order for a decision to be adopted? Such considerations are lacking in the RAM and HRM, but form an important part of the GPM.

Ermarth was not the only critic of Allison’s models, however. In their article “Rethinking Allison’s Models,” published in *The American Political Science Review*, Bendor and Hammond detailed some critiques against Allison’s ideas. These criticisms include that the GPM “misconstrues the nature of executive branch policymaking. In particular...the central claim (that policymaking necessarily involves bargaining among executive branch decision makers) must be questioned.”<sup>18</sup> They also take issue with the fact that the model “said surprisingly little about the fact that executive branch policymaking takes place within a hierarchy.”<sup>19</sup> And finally, they believe that the model “is simply too complex. There are so many different assumptions,

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<sup>18</sup> Bendor, Jonathan, and Thomas H. Hammond. "Rethinking Allison's Models." *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 2 (1992): 301-22. P.314

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

variables, and relationships in [the GPM] that it is almost impossible to determine the role and impact of any one of them.”<sup>20</sup> I will respond to each of these criticisms in turn.

First, while the authors’ initial criticism, that decision making within the executive branch might not involve bargaining between actors, may hold some weight in regard to certain executive decisions in US politics, it is certainly not the case in all countries, particularly, as I will later discuss, contemporary Russia. Even inside the US, however, such a criticism seems flimsy. Although presidents might have the final say when it comes to certain types of executive decisions, they still engage in a certain degree of consensus building for particular issues, so as not to unnecessarily alienate those within their policy circle.

In regard to Bendor and Hammond’s second critique, that Allison overlooks the hierarchy in which executive decision making occurs, I again disagree. One of the key pieces of a GPM analysis pertains to the ‘action channels’ through which the actors must navigate. Any countries’ hierarchical system will be slightly, or entirely, different, so there is no need for the model to cite such system explicitly. Rather, hierarchical considerations would fall into the action channel analysis. As with the first criticism, the authors appear to level this reproach towards Allison’s model in regard to US policymaking, but the use of a GPM for Russia would require an entirely different view of hierarchy. The differing political structures of these two states seem to make such a criticism irrelevant.

Finally, the authors’ criticism of the GPM’s complexity is well placed. It is indeed more complex to consider many different actors and interactions than simply taking the unified nature of the state for granted. Because of its complexity, I would contend that such a model is not well

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

suited on its own for analyzing crisis management situations. Rather, such a perspective, or frame of mind, can be useful even in a crisis to stimulate different points of view on the situation, but this does not mean it cannot be used in conjunction with a theoretically simpler Rational Actor Model. Indeed, Allison argues in his book that these models are best kept together, ‘in the same toolbox’ so to speak, rather than existing completely independent of one another.

Thus, each of the three models detailed above focuses a long tradition of scholarly thought to the examination of a particular event, in this case Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008. The Rational Actor Model (RAM) approximating Realism, the Honor-Respect Model (HRM) corresponding to Constructivism, and the Governmental Process Model (GPM) resembling Liberalism. Having discussed each model in the theoretical sense, it is now time to apply them to the Georgian crisis.

## **Applying and Assessing the Models**

In this chapter I provide a quick history of the conflict between Russia and Georgia, before laying out the frameworks for the models. I then both apply the models to the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, and assess the pros and cons of using each model to analyze the conflict. As mentioned in the previous section, these models are not so much concrete embodiments of different theories from the field of International Relations, but are rather inspired by the assumptions which these theories make in regard to the structure of the state and state decision-making.

Russia's interests in the Caucasus go back centuries, and are not informed solely by geostrategic concerns. The first significant linkages between Russians and Georgians were more a result of common religion, rather than proximity. Occupied by the Muslim Ottoman and Persian empires, the Christian Orthodox Georgians of the 1700s were in a very difficult position. They desired freedom from their occupiers, but were not strong enough to fight for it. As a result, "the Georgians, particularly their bishops, appealed for help from their co-religionists (Russia) on the grounds of a shared faith. Aside from the religious question, Russia was the only state with the potential capacity to intervene directly in Transcaucasia."<sup>21</sup> Thus, the Orthodox bishops in Georgia helped to convince Georgian elites that Russian rule would be preferable to that of the Ottomans or Persians.

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<sup>21</sup> Gvosdev, Nikolas K. *Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, 1760-1819*. New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000., p.5

On the Russian side, the great debate about Georgia during the late eighteenth century/early nineteenth century was whether to ally with the Georgian lands or absorb them into the Russian empire. The first formal recognition of Russian interests in the area came in the form of the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk, which established the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as a Russian protectorate in order to arrest the growing threat of Persian and Ottoman expansion.<sup>22</sup> As a result, Russia sees its links with Georgia as arising from this role of protector, which feeds strongly into Russia's sense of honor in the Transcaucasus region.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Georgian lands were successively annexed into the Russian empire, of which they would remain a territory until a brief period of independence between 1918 and 1921. The roots of conflict over the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be found during this time period. Shortly after Georgia declared its independence in 1918, it signed a treaty with Abkhazia "recognizing its non-Georgian status," but soon used "a mixture of political intrigue and violence... [which] forced Abkhazia into its orbit."<sup>23</sup> Such an imposition was particularly upsetting to Abkhazians in general, as they had long enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy compared to the other Georgian lands.

Although annexed by Russia in 1810, "Abkhazia continued to administer its own affairs until June 1864," far longer than other parts of the region.<sup>24</sup> Abkhazia was not the only region experiencing such struggles during the period of Georgian independence, however. "Georgian troops applied Georgia's policy of 'fire and sword' also in South Ossetia during this period (1918-1921), which witnessed a number of bloodily suppressed uprisings against Menshevik

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<sup>22</sup> Broers, Laurence. "'David and Goliath' and 'Georgians in the Kremlin': A Post-colonial Perspective on Conflict in Post-Soviet Georgia." *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 2 (2009): 99-118. p.101

<sup>23</sup> Hewitt, George. "Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Crisis of August 2008: Roots and Lessons." *Global Dialogue* 11 (2009): 11-22. p.15

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.12

rule.”<sup>25</sup> As a result of these conflicts, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were assigned special autonomous statuses by the Soviet Union.

Under the Soviet Union’s federalized structure, many territories were recognized as Autonomous Republics or Oblasts due to their titular ethnic minorities. Despite the wishes of many of these groups, only those territories on the Union Republic level were able to achieve independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result, Abkhazia, which had been an Autonomous Republic, and South Ossetia, which had existed as an Autonomous Oblast, were subsumed into the newly independent state of Georgia, which had been a Union Republic. Abkhazia and South Ossetia desired independence, however, and fought wars of secession with Georgia in the early 1990s. Although the two regions did not gain internationally recognized independence, they were able to push Georgian troops out to such an extent that they became de facto autonomous.

Just as Russia’s considers its honor at stake vis-à-vis Georgia because of its historical role of Georgia’s protector, Georgian honor in the region is in danger because of the damage done to its sovereignty. For Georgia, “sovereignty is territorially incomplete; the very outline of Georgia on a map and weather reports of conditions in Sukhum/i and Tskhinval/i [the respective capitals of Abkhazia and South Ossetia] are daily reminders of the loss of control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, Georgia has consistently attempted to assert its control over the breakaway regions throughout the 1990s and 2000s. “Georgia’s first round of conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia ended with the Russian-brokered peace settlements in South Ossetia in 1992 and Abkhazia in 1994,” leading to a situation where Russia kept “an active peacekeeping role, and Georgia had little choice but to accept Russian domination,” as the settlements were

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>26</sup> Broers, “A Post-colonial Perspective on Conflict in Post-Soviet Georgia”, p.111

upheld by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, throughout the first half of the 1990s “the Russian army continued to be the most powerful military force in Georgia..., supplying weapons – legally and illegally – to Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatists...”<sup>28</sup> These peacekeeping forces have remained in the regions ever since, although they have not always acted in the best interests of peace. For example, “they did not prevent South Ossetian shelling of Georgian villages or peacekeepers – often within view or from their very own positions. They sometimes sheltered South Ossetian militias conducting those barrages and worked with them in other ways.”<sup>29</sup> As a result, Georgia became less and less patient with the nearby presence of these Russian troops, especially when those troops existed as a means to prevent Georgia from reasserting control over the breakaway territories.

The 2004 election of Saakashvili as President of Georgia, following the Rose Revolution in late 2003, brought a new dynamic to the conflict. “One of Saakashvili’s main promises in his election campaigns had been to bring Ajaria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia under Georgian constitutional control.”<sup>30</sup> The fact that Saakashvili was elected with 96% of the vote sent a strong message that the Georgian populace supported the goal of regaining constitutional control over the separatist areas. “To Russia’s great annoyance, Georgia made several noises, including a parliamentary resolution in February 2006, to the effect that Russian peacekeepers were no

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<sup>27</sup> Mouritzen, Hans, and Anders Wivel. *Explaining Foreign Policy: International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012. p.12

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Asmus, Ronald. *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p.43

<sup>30</sup> Mouritzen, *Explaining Foreign Policy*, p.69



longer welcome in the break-away regions.”<sup>31</sup> Although such a resolution would certainly not sway Russia to remove its troops, this was yet another sign that Georgia was not willing to submit to Russia’s desires in the region.

Saakashvili’s reelection in 2008, yet again on a platform which included a desire to regain control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, signaled a continuation of tensions. These years of hostile tensions culminated in the summer of 2008. “Violence escalated in June and especially July with intensification of ceasefire violations by both sides and mutual accusations of war preparations.”<sup>32</sup> One example of such provocations was when, “On 1 August, five Georgian police officers were killed in South Ossetia; in retaliation shortly thereafter, six South Ossetian police officers were killed by pro-Georgian paramilitary forces.”<sup>33</sup> That same week saw a massive Georgian troop buildup along the border with South Ossetia, and to a lesser extent Abkhazia. Finally, on the night of August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008, following intense bombardments by both South Ossetian militias and Georgian troops, Georgia launched a land attack on the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali. “Georgian forces succeeded in reaching the center of Tskhinvali, but South Ossetian militias with infantry weapons prevented them from securing the city.”<sup>34</sup> Shortly thereafter, Russian troops arrived to reinforce the relatively lightly armed peacekeeping force, and soon pushed on into Georgian territory. More details of the war will be discussed throughout this chapter, as they pertain to each model.

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<sup>31</sup> Tsygankov, Andrei P., and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist. "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2009, 307-26. p.311

<sup>32</sup> Tsygankov, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," p.312

<sup>33</sup> Mouritzen, *Explaining Foreign Policy*, p.59

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.61

After setting up each model, I will consider the advantages and disadvantages of using each model to explain the Russo-Georgian war. To do this, I will ask three questions about Russian decision making and one question about Georgian decision making, as both sides pertain to the war and its aftermath. I will then compare what actually happened versus what each model would predict. These questions are: (1) Does the model account for the use of force? (2) Does the model account for the lack of a Russian army advance to Tbilisi, or an overthrow of Saakashvili? (3) Does the model predict Russia's recognition of Abkhazian/South Ossetian independence? The third question refers to the fact that "quickly following the war, Russia moved to recognize South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence."<sup>35</sup> Finally, to consider the Georgian side of the conflict, I will ask (4) Does the model account for the Georgian decision to begin the attack on the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali? By considering how well each model predicted the actual course of events, it is possible to evaluate how useful the framework is for analyzing the events of the 2008 conflict.

### A Realist View

Rational Actor Model - In order to explain the Russian invasion of Georgia:

Assume:

- 1.) The decision is the action of a state.
- 2.) The state is a unified actor.
- 3.) The state has a coherent goal.
- 4.) The state acts in relation to threats and opportunities.
- 5.) The state's action is value-maximizing.

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<sup>35</sup>Ellison, Brian. "Russian Grand Strategy in the South Ossetia War." *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 4 (2011): 343-66. p.353

Ask:

- 1.) What are the state's goals?
  - a. [Survival]
- 2.) What are the circumstances that the state conceives as threats and opportunities?
  - a. [Possible NATO expansion into Georgia]
- 3.) What are the options for addressing the issue?
  - a. [1.) Soft-Power Influence, 2.) Economic Coercion, 3.) Military Coercion]
- 4.) What are the strategic costs and benefits of each option?
  - a. [Shifting scale of low-cost to high-cost, benefit is prevention of NATO expansion]
- 5.) To maximize the actor's objectives in the specified conditions, what is the best choice?
  - a. [Military coercion turned out to be the best choice, as other options were tried and did not work.]

As detailed in the previous chapter, the realist model assumes as the actor a unified Russian state, made up of state institutions, such as the Duma and the Presidential Administration, personified in the Russian President. Russia's fundamental goal is its own survival, an objective which it has pursued through power, wealth, and in particular, geopolitical strategy. In the context of Georgia in 2008, the threat of NATO expansion arose for Russia. This section will address, through a realist perspective, the various options available to Russia, and why Russia eventually chose military invasion.

Although relations between Georgia, a former Soviet republic, and Russia had been less than stellar following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mikheil Saakashvili's ascension to power following the 2003 Rose Revolution created further strain. Saakashvili's attempts to bring Georgia closer to the West were particularly inflammatory. These tensions were "evidence of Moscow's view that foreign influence – and especially a foreign military presence – around its borders constituted a direct threat to Russian security."<sup>36</sup> If NATO, the longtime arch-enemy of the Russian Federation's Soviet predecessor, expanded into Georgia, Russia's power in the

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<sup>36</sup> Mankoff, Jeffrey. *Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012. P.235

region would be seriously contested, and its security position diminished. Russia had several options for addressing the issue of NATO expansion: soft-power influence, economic pressure, and military coercion.

The timeline of events that led to the Georgian-Russian War in 2008 can be seen as the roadmap through Russia's options for action. Prior to 2008, Russia had attempted to use soft-power to regain strategic influence in the Near Abroad, particularly Georgia. Soft-power is described by political scientist Joseph Nye as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies."<sup>37</sup> Russia, however, cannot openly seek support in the name of authoritarianism or national self-interest. If neighboring countries felt that they were being exploited, they would be less likely to open themselves up to Russia's influence.

Putin's government tried to remedy this situation by developing the concept of 'sovereign democracy' as a banner to rally behind in the soft power struggle of influence. This concept, coined by Vladislav Surkov, the former First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, is designed as an alternative to post-Color Revolution states, which Russia sees as being instigated by the West.<sup>38</sup> The idea is meant to imply a type of democratic governance which is not beholden to the West.

The purpose of this 'sovereign democracy' concept is in part to improve Russia's image among citizens of the near abroad. It is not too far-fetched to assume that there are still many in those nations, born and raised in a Soviet system that warned of the constant threat of an

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<sup>37</sup> Nye, Joseph S.. *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004. P.X

<sup>38</sup> Popescu, Nicu. "Russia's Soft Power Ambitions." The Centre for European Policy Studies. October 1, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2015. [ceps.be/system/files/book/1388.pdf](http://ceps.be/system/files/book/1388.pdf).

aggressive NATO, who appreciate the idea of Russia standing up to the West, or presenting a valid, 'sovereign' alternative to Western democracy. By sovereign alternative, I mean a system that does not easily defer to the West, but rather asserts its own destiny in terms of political choices, both international and domestic.

In the words of Ivan Krastev, an expert on Russian foreign policy,

the major objective of this policy [of sovereign democracy] is to develop an efficient infrastructure of ideas, institutions, networks and media outlets that can use the predictable crisis of the current orange-type regimes to regain influence not simply at the level of government but at the level of society as well. Russia will not fight democracy in these countries. Russia will fight for democracy – *its* kind of democracy.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, if soft-power could catch on in the Near Abroad, Russia would not have to resort to costlier options to maintain influence. The problem, however, was that this form of soft power was not enough to keep the post-Soviet republics in their proper orbit around Moscow. By the time this idea was rolled out in 2006, Georgians already largely supported moving towards the West. Because sovereign democracy did not end up providing much influence, Russia had two remaining choices: economic coercion or military coercion.

As with soft-power, Russia had already tried economic coercion prior to 2008. However, thanks to Georgia's geographical features, Russia's usual ability to coerce neighbors with the threat of increased gas prices, or even cutting off the supply of gas entirely, was not effective. Georgia's mountainous features, combined with the strong development of energy infrastructure in the 1990s and 2000s with a focus on hydroelectricity, meant that Georgia did not rely as heavily on gas imports as other near abroad states. Also, its neighbor, Azerbaijan, is rich with

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<sup>39</sup> Krastev, Ivan. "Russia's Post-Orange Empire." openDemocracy.  
[http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-ukraine/postorange\\_2947.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-ukraine/postorange_2947.jsp) (accessed February 27, 2015).

energy resources, and enabled Georgia to meet its demand without relying solely on Russia.<sup>40</sup>

The failure of soft-power influence and economic coercion to have the desired effect on Georgia meant that Russia's options were limited.

By 2008, the situation was becoming more urgent for Russia. A January non-binding referendum held in Georgia, which asked citizens whether or not Georgia should join NATO, resulted in a seventy-seven percent vote in favor of NATO membership.<sup>41</sup> The results of the referendum were like a shot across the bow to Russian leaders. Shortly thereafter, Russia's return volley came in the form of remarks made at a meeting between Boris Gryzlov, then the Russian parliamentary speaker, and the leadership of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, break-away regions within Georgia, which were supported significantly by Russia.

Gryzlov proclaimed that Russia should “‘reshape its relations with self-proclaimed republics’ in the former Soviet Union.”<sup>42</sup> This move distressed Georgian leaders, as such a statement, in such a context, clearly meant that Russia was in the process of changing the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, this initial warning did not forestall Georgia's growing ties with NATO. Deciding to turn up heat on Georgia, Russia soon announced that it would lift sanctions off Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which had been agreed to by the

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<sup>40</sup> Woehrel, Steven. "Russian Energy Policy Toward Neighboring Countries." <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34261.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2015). P.11

<sup>41</sup> NATO. "Deepening Relations with Georgia." . [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pdf/pdf\\_publications/Deepening\\_Relations\\_with\\_Georgia\\_EN.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/Deepening_Relations_with_Georgia_EN.pdf) (accessed February 26, 2015)., p.15

<sup>42</sup> The Messenger. "Separatist leaders give no indication of imminent recognition from Moscow." . [http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/1550\\_february\\_20\\_2008/1550\\_kosovo.html](http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/1550_february_20_2008/1550_kosovo.html) (accessed February 28, 2015).

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), of which Georgia was a member.<sup>43</sup> While this was far from recognizing the independence of these separatist regions, Russia's decision signaled an increasingly hostile tone towards Georgia.

However, Georgia still pressed ahead with its desire to join NATO. In early April 2008, NATO held a summit in which it made the following announcement:

NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications.<sup>44</sup>

NATO's announcement was terrible news for Russia. Russian attempts at influencing Georgia into stepping back from NATO had failed, and Russia's foreign policy options were running out. Russia finally resorted to a blunt threat. At a news conference in Moscow shortly

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<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. "Russian Federation Withdraws from Regime of Restrictions Established in 1996 for Abkhazia." . [http://web.archive.org/web/20080901193119/http://www.ln.mid.ru/Brp\\_4.nsf/arh/79C58F476CAEC4E8C32574040058934C?OpenDocument](http://web.archive.org/web/20080901193119/http://www.ln.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/79C58F476CAEC4E8C32574040058934C?OpenDocument) (accessed February 28, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> NATO. "Bucharest Summit Declaration." NATO. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm) (accessed February 28, 2015).

after NATO's summit, Russian Army General Yuri Baluyevsky stated that if Georgia were to join NATO, "Russia will take steps aimed at ensuring its interests along its borders... These will not only be military steps, but also steps of a different nature."<sup>45</sup> Although the general did not give any further details about what this statement might mean, it seems likely in retrospect that he was referring to the utilization of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian frozen conflicts. If Russia could make certain that these conflicts were not solved, Georgia would essentially be barred from joining NATO, as the organization lists among its joining principles that candidate states must resolve internal territorial disputes and ethnic hostilities.<sup>46</sup>

The frozen conflicts inherent in Georgia are the previously mentioned separatist movements in its west and north, those of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the 1990s, there was the "outbreak of a short war in South Ossetia... that lasted two years before a Russian-mediated ceasefire ended active hostilities for a time. The end of the South Ossetia conflict in 1992 was followed immediately by a second separatist conflict in Georgia, this time in Abkhazia. That conflict ceased in 1993-1994 as a result of Russian and UN mediation."<sup>47</sup> Between that time and the late 2000s, Russian peacekeepers remained in those regions in very small numbers. The problem for Russia in 2008 was that these regions were not fully independent or under Russian control. Whether it was always planned to use these regions as a policy tool is so far impossible to know, but by 2008, Russia clearly knew how to go about doing so.

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<sup>45</sup> Dick, Charles. "Russia army vows steps if Georgia and Ukraine join NATO." Reuters. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/04/11/us-russia-nato-steps-idUSL1143027920080411> (accessed February 26, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Tomiuc, Eugen. "NATO: What Does It Take To Join?" Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. March 7, 2002. Accessed February 26, 2015. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1099020.html>.

<sup>47</sup> MacFarlane, Neil. "Frozen Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union – The Case of Georgia/South Ossetia." In *OSCE Yearbook 2008*. Vienna: OSCE, 2009, p.1



As summer approached and Georgia had given no indication of bowing to Moscow's threats, Russia's remaining option was military coercion. In the first week of August, the border between the separatist areas and Georgia proper reached a boiling point. The exact progression of what happened next is highly disputed between the warring parties, but eventually, in response to a great deal of artillery fire towards Georgian territory from South Ossetia, the Georgian army pushed into the region to reestablish some degree of Georgian control. As a result, Russian forces crossed the border en masse and pushed the Georgian troops all the way back to Tbilisi.<sup>48</sup> In regard to Russia's utilization of the frozen conflict status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a means of foreign policy, the details of the war itself are not as important as the events leading up to it.

It appears Russia was purposefully goading Georgia into invading the breakaway region, so that the Russian forces could act.<sup>49</sup> Russia's provocations, however, do not mean that the war was inevitable. The only other alternative would have been for Georgia to essentially relinquish any claim over the breakaway regions. If, for whatever reason, the Georgian leadership had granted autonomy to the regions, rather than responding with aggression, Russia may have embarked upon the same path of recognizing the independence of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as a means of preventing Georgia from joining NATO. By recognizing the independence of these regions in August 2008, Russia essentially made the conflicts impossible to resolve.

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<sup>48</sup> Allison, Roy. "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign To 'coerce Georgia To Peace'." *International Affairs*, 2008, 1145-171.

<sup>49</sup> Friedman, George. "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power." Stratfor. Accessed February 28, 2015 [http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo\\_georgian\\_war\\_and\\_balance\\_power](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power).

For example, because of Moscow's guaranteed support, "the Abkhaz leaders refuse to discuss – literally they refuse to take official delivery of – the outline of a political settlement, prepared by senior German diplomat Dieter Boden and supported by the U.S. and other Western Countries."<sup>50</sup> It benefits Russia for such regions to remain in a state of political dispute. If Abkhazia or South Ossetia literally became independent (i.e. recognized by more than a handful of states such as Russia and the Republic of Nauru), then Russia's objectives would be compromised: the frozen conflicts that prevent Georgia from joining NATO would be solved, reopening the door to future Georgian membership. As it stands, however, Georgia would have to officially relinquish these territories if it desires NATO membership, and if serious discussions about membership resume, Russia would be able to entice the separatists to once again increase violence along its border.

Thus, perceiving Georgian NATO membership to be a serious threat to its security position, Russia acted to prevent the realization of this threat. Following the failure of less costly options such as soft-power and economic coercion, Russia's remaining option was military coercion, leading to the continued existence of a frozen conflict. As long as Georgia does not appear to be closing in on NATO membership in the future, the likelihood of further violence between Georgia and the Russian-backed separatists remains low.

I will now consider how well this model accounts for Russia's war with Georgia. First, I will consider three questions about the war itself, and how well the RAM answers them. Does the model account for the use of force? The RAM certainly accounts for this, as, in this view, Russia is responding to a serious security concern against Georgia, a much smaller state. Thus, it

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<sup>50</sup> Socor, Vladimir. "The Frozen Conflicts: A challenge to Euro-Atlantic Interests." . [http://www.jamestown.org/fileadmin/Vlads\\_Corner/policypapers/KonstRon.doc](http://www.jamestown.org/fileadmin/Vlads_Corner/policypapers/KonstRon.doc) (accessed February 27, 2015). P.3

has a high likelihood of success, and much to gain from controlling the security threat (i.e. ensuring Georgia does not join NATO). Does the model account for a lack of a Russian army advance to Tbilisi or an overthrow of Saakashvili? This is where the RAM is weak.

If Russia had been truly responding solely to a security threat, it would likely have carried out regime change to ensure the Georgian government would follow Russian wishes in the future. Leaving Saakashvili's government in charge after it had ignored all of Moscow's enticements and threats in order to seek a closer relationship with NATO seems highly undesirable for Russia. The fact that the army stopped short of Tbilisi exposes a weakness of this model. Finally, the RAM would not clearly predict Russia's recognition of Abkhazian/South Ossetian independence. The model would expect from a security perspective that Russia would ensure some kind of buffer zone between itself and Georgia, and whether this was through recognizing independence or continuing the pre-war status quo is not particularly important.

Now I will consider the model's effectiveness in explaining Georgian action in the conflict. Does the model account for Georgia's decision to attack Tskhinvali? At first glance, it would seem that the RAM is quite weak in explaining this decision. Assuming Georgia's fundamental goal is survival, it seems completely irrational for a comparatively small state like Georgia to commit an action which would likely result in a military response from a much larger neighbor.

However, in retrospect, it seems that the Georgian leadership assumed that Russia would either be unable or unwilling to mount an effective response. Saakashvili made statements several months before the war began which support this view. Speaking about Russian forces in

March 2008, the Georgian President said “Their army in the Caucasus is too weak even to stabilize the situation on their own territory. And I do not think that they are ready to go on any adventure in a foreign land.”<sup>51</sup> This view may have in part been fueled by a dearth of Georgian military intelligence about Russia’s capabilities. Georgia’s armed forces relied on United States satellite reports, but these were lacking at the time, as US attention was focused elsewhere.

For example, following the start of the August war, an anonymous US intelligence official stated that “it took us a few days to shift some assets and get a clear picture of what was actually going on.”<sup>52</sup> This issue, when combined with the fact that “the intelligence unit in the Georgian Ministry of Defense had been disbanded in 2005,” meant that the overall state of intelligence was severely hampered.<sup>53</sup> With this in mind, it is possible that Georgia’s decision to act was not in fact irrational, but was instead predicated upon faulty or incomplete information. The RAM could therefore still predict Georgian action against a larger neighbor.

But would the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali somehow further Georgia’s security goals? One answer might lie in the danger posed by the separatist presence in South Ossetia. For example, Georgia’s security was threatened by these “islands of instability near its borders, serving as potential channels for trafficking in weapons, drugs, or nuclear materials, and threatened the safety of transportation routes from the oil-rich Caspian region.”<sup>54</sup> As the instability of this area increase in the spring and summer of 2008, Georgia would have had

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<sup>51</sup> Mouritzen, *Explaining Foreign Policy*, p.71

<sup>52</sup> Blank, Stephen. "From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis Before the 2008 War." In *Guns of August 2008 : Russia's War in Georgia*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2009. p.119

<sup>53</sup> Mouritzen, *Explaining Foreign Policy*, p.71

<sup>54</sup> Tarkhan-Mouravi, Gia. "Georgia's European Aspirations and the Eastern Partnership." In *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, 49-73. New York: Routledge, 2014. p.53

greater reason to attempt a resumption of control over part of the enclave, especially when the South Ossetian militia forces intensified its artillery strikes. Thus, when viewed in the context of Georgia's imperfect information situation leading up to August 2008, the RAM would predict Georgian action to regain some degree of control over South Ossetia following the intensification of conflict in preceding weeks.

Further advantages of using this model are that it accounts for Russia's anti-NATO rhetoric leading up to the conflict, in which Russia continuously warned Georgia and the West that it would not tolerate NATO expansion so close to home. The RAM also accounts for the measured escalation of conflict which Russia undertook. By this I mean Russia exhausted its options from least risky (economic/cultural pressure) to most risky (open warfare), rather than opting for military intervention earlier.

Disadvantages of this model are that it assumes absolute rationality of Russia's leaders. Although I do not argue that Putin is mad or irrational, the assumption of absolute rationality is a stretch when it comes to the human leadership in charge of states. Similarly, this model ignores the personal interests of those in leadership positions, as well as the conflict of values between Russia and the West. Conflict of values refers to Russia's likely disdain for the possibility of a liberal democratic state on the Russian border, which may have resulted from further Georgian integration with the EU/NATO structures. To deal with some of these disadvantages, I now turn to the next possible framework.

### A Constructivist View

Honor Respect Model - In order to explain the Russian invasion of Georgia:

Assume:

- 1.) The decision is the action of a state.

- 2.) The state is a unified actor.
- 3.) The state has a coherent goal.
- 4.) The state acts in relation to threats and opportunities.
- 5.) The state's action is value-maximizing.

Ask:

- 1.) What are the state's goals?
  - a. [Uphold prestige]
- 2.) What does the state perceive as slights to its honor?
  - a. [Georgia rejecting Russian influence, NATO's lack of consultation]
- 3.) What are the options for addressing the issue?
  - a. [1.) Soft-Power Influence, 2.) Economic Coercion, 3.) Military Coercion]
- 4.) What are the strategic costs and benefits of each option?
  - a. [Shifting scale of low-cost to high-cost, benefits is resumption of position as strong regional power]
- 5.) To maximize the actor's objectives in the specified conditions, what is the best choice?
  - a. [Russia attempted each option until one of them worked. As a result, Military Coercion is the de facto best choice]

To apply the HRM to the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, one can consider many of the events detailed in the application of the RAM. The difference is that the HRM views Russia's concerns with Georgian and Western support for NATO expansion as less of a purely security threat, and more of an insult to Russia's prestige. The war is a perfect example of the confluence of what Tsygankov argues are the "two essential dimensions of Russia's honor – European and local."<sup>55</sup> In the lead up to the war, Russian honor was slighted in both of these spheres. Local in the sense that Russia perceived "Georgia's rejection of Russia [as] a humiliation to a nation which has considered itself Georgia's historic protector..." and European in the sense that Russia saw NATO's attempts at expansion as an encroachment into its sphere of influence.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. p.5

<sup>56</sup> Tsygankov, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," p.308

In the early 2000s, an eventual war between Georgia and Russia hardly seemed inevitable. Although Saakashvili had come to power in an electoral revolution which caused worry in Russia, there was initial optimism that Russo-Georgian relations could be strengthened. For example, Saakashvili noted the presence of Chechen rebels operating from within Georgian territory, and pledged to help combat them.<sup>57</sup> For its part, Russia provided energy subsidies and investment to Georgia, in addition to helping defuse a separatist movement in the Georgian territory of Adjara in May 2004, increasing hopes for close relations.<sup>58</sup>

Despite these examples of cooperation, Saakashvili continued to court Western influence in Georgia. The Georgian president's announcement in April 2004 that he would like to soon join the EU, combined with Georgia's continued interest in NATO expansion, demonstrated to Russia that Georgia was attempting to leave Russia's sphere of influence. Georgia's continued shift toward the West could be interpreted as insulting to Russia not only because of the long history of connection, but in particular because it seemed as if Georgia was ungrateful for the assistance Russia had recently provided.

Saakashvili had reason to court Western influence, however. Russian hegemony in the region was not always beneficial for Georgia. Part of Russia's view of itself as a regional power meant that it often acted in ways that infringed on Georgian sovereignty. For example, "In February 2005, Russia reiterated that it reserved the right to wage preventive strikes into Georgian territory against potential terrorists."<sup>59</sup> For Russia, such action seemed perfectly reasonable for an influential regional hegemon. Russia would provide Georgia with assistance in exchange for the ability to act upon its own interests in the region, even if it meant pushing the

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<sup>57</sup> Tysgankov, *Honor in International Relations*, p.237

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.237-238

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.238

boundary on Georgia's sovereignty. For Georgia, however, an independent country with its own aspirations, these infringements were unacceptable, and led to Georgian attempts to reassert Georgia's presence in the region. For example, in July of 2006, Georgia acted without Russian consultation when it "moved its troops into Abkhazia's upper Kodori Gorge and installed a Tbilisi-controlled 'government of Abkhazia there.'"<sup>60</sup>

This back and forth of cooperation and conflict continued until late 2006, when a turning point was reached which led to a precipitous decline in relations. In late September, Georgia arrested four Russian officers and charged them with spying.<sup>61</sup> In response, Russia suspended withdrawal of troops from Russian military bases in Georgia, as well as withdrawing diplomatic personnel. In addition to these actions, Russia closed off transport links between Russia and Georgia, tightened visa regulations, and began deporting Georgians who had been living in Russia.<sup>62</sup> This incident is an example of Russia basing foreign policy towards its neighbor because of insult, rather than security concern. Arresting four officers is hardly dangerous to Russia's security, but such an act was certainly a sign from the Georgian government that it was unwilling to bow to Russia's interests. Thus, the seeds for armed conflict were planted in a struggle of honor and reputation.

The RAM views the Russo-Georgian War as not only a security conflict between Russia and Georgia, but also between Russia and NATO. Similarly, the HRM interprets the conflict as a problem on two fronts. In addition to the interactions between Russia and Georgia listed

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<sup>60</sup> Nicoll, Alexander, and Sarah Johnstone. "Sparring over Abkhazia." *Strategic Comments* 14, no. 05 (2008): 1-2.p.2

<sup>61</sup> "Putin Fury at Georgia 'terrorism'" BBC News. October 2, 2006. Accessed March 10, 2015. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5397102.stm>.

<sup>62</sup> "Putin Calls for Georgia Pressure." BBC News. October 6, 2006. Accessed March 10, 2015. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5415014.stm>.



above, the war also contains elements of a conflict over honor between Russia and NATO states, specifically in regard to NATO expansion.

The difference is that, whereas the RAM would argue that Russia views the final product of expansion, NATO troops on its border, as the biggest problem, the HRM would argue that Russia is also upset by the lack of consideration the NATO states give to Russia's interests when considering an expansion agenda. One example of anger over this lack of consideration was a speech at the Munich security conference in 2007, when President Putin stated that NATO expansion "represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust...And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today?"<sup>63</sup> Referencing such promises made many years prior does not exclude the possibility of security concerns, but appears to be evidence that Russia felt disrespected by NATO's actions in regard to expansion, the implication being that such promises would have been kept if Russia was seen as an important global power.

Similarly, "in August 2008 Russia's ambassador to NATO, Dmitri Rogozin underlined that after the Russian-Georgian war the West '[...] has now started to look at Russia differently - namely with respect - and I consider this to be Russia's key diplomatic achievement.'"<sup>64</sup> It is telling that a high level official would specifically voice displeasure over the lack of respect, rather than simply the existence of security threats from NATO. Such statements demonstrate the fact that considerations of prestige and world standing play into Russia's mindset when dealing with such issues.

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<sup>63</sup> Putin, Vladimir. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." President of Russia. February 10, 2007. Accessed March 27, 2015. [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138\\_type82912type82914type82917type84779\\_118123.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml).

<sup>64</sup> Heller, Regina. "Russia's Quest for Respect in the International Conflict Management in Kosovo." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014): 333-43. p.341

Further evidence for the HRM lies in the way in which the war was waged. Rather than simply pushing Georgian forces out of South Ossetia, the Russian counterattack “went beyond the zones of conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia proper, and occupied for weeks the Georgian towns of Gori, Poti, and Senaki, to humiliate Tbilisi and let it feel its defeat.”<sup>65</sup> Although the Russian military, with its superior numbers and equipment, could certainly have pushed into Tbilisi and overthrown Saakashvili, it refrained from doing so. Through the lens of the HRM, the lack of an attempt to capture Tbilisi suggests an honor/reputational motive for the conflict. If Russia had been acting solely from a security motive, the Russians would have likely replaced Saakashvili’s administration with one that could be counted on to serve Russia’s interests in the region. Instead, however, once Russia felt it had proved its point and protected South Ossetia from Georgian aggression, it withdrew.

To assess the usefulness of this model, I once again return to four fundamental questions about the Russo-Georgian War. The HRM, like the RAM, accounts for the use of force. In this view, Russia and Georgia had been growing more and more hostile to each other, with provocations on both sides, until it reached a breaking point with Georgia’s incursion into South Ossetia, and Russia’s push back. Similarly, the HRM accounts for the lack of troop advancement all the way to Tbilisi, and the fact that Russia did not attempt to depose Saakashvili. While it is certainly possible the Kremlin hoped that Saakashvili would be overthrown by a popular uprising due to his embarrassing defeat, Russia nonetheless did not ensure a puppet-regime within its southern neighbor. The lack of regime-change fits with the HRM narrative of Russia ‘teaching the Georgians a lesson,’ rather than responding to a dangerous security threat.

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<sup>65</sup> Trenin, Dmitrii. *Post-imperium: a Eurasian Story*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011. p.30

In addition, the HRM would predict the recognition of independence in the disputed enclaves. The independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia serves as a final humiliation to Georgia, without requiring that the regions be annexed and officially become Russian territory. Other advantages of the HRM are that it accounts for the lack of more serious attempts at diplomacy. By this I mean that Russia, rather than approaching the negotiating table with Georgia prior to the war, instead adopted a stance of ‘do what we say, or else,’ which fits strongly with the narrative that its hostility towards Georgia was significantly about its honor being slighted by Georgia’s and the West’s implicit denial of Russia’s influence in the region. In this view, diplomacy over a security threat could have taken place with cooler heads, but perceptions of insults and slights prevented this.

Finally, the HRM accounts for Georgia’s decision to launch its attack on Tskhinvali. The same intelligence issues discussed in regard to the RAM would have led Georgia to view military action low-risk enough to seriously consider. The important question here is if there existed a reason for attacking which related to Georgia’s honor. The answer is undeniably yes. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Georgia put great stock in its ability to seek independent relationships with the West, as well as assert some degree of constitutional control over the separatist regions. Indeed, Svante Cornell, an expert on political issues in the South Caucasus, argues that “since its independence, Georgia has been the most vocally independent-minded country in the former Soviet Union.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, rather than viewing Georgia’s decision to attack Tskhinvali as a simply a security issue, the HRM would consider Georgia’s independent character, as well as its history vis-à-vis the separatist enclaves, as strong evidence that Georgia would eventually attempt to resume control over the territories.

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<sup>66</sup> Cornell, Svante. "Georgia after the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy." In *Georgia after the Rose Revolution*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009. p.28

For example, in his book *A Little War That Shook the World*, Ronald Asmus writes that, as August approached “Georgians would passionately recall how their forefathers had not fought the Bolsheviks in 1921 and had lost their independence for the next seventy years. They would with great emotion explain how no Georgian leader could afford to lose the separatist provinces without a fight.”<sup>67</sup> This is an example of how, as conflict around South Ossetia intensified throughout the spring and early summer, perceptions of honor stemming from historical-cultural events played a role in Georgia’s response to the situation. However, a disadvantage of this view is that it does not take into account the personal interests or perceptions of those contributing to decision making in either Russia or Georgia. The next model will attempt to address this inadequacy.

### A Liberal View

Governmental Politics Model - In order to explain the Russian invasion of Georgia:

Assume:

- 1.) The decision is the result of internal political competition.
- 2.) The state is an actor comprised of different players.
- 3.) The state does not have a coherent goal.
- 4.) The players act in relation to personal perceptions and interests.

Ask:

- 1.) Who are the players?
  - a. [Various factions within Putin’s inner circle]
- 2.) What factors shape the players’ perceptions and preferences?
  - a. [Personal position and background / Identity visions for Russia /]
- 3.) What factors account for the players’ ability to impact the decision?
  - a. [Highly centralized, yet informal governmental structure]
- 4.) What are the action channels through which players’ can take action?
  - a. [Combination of official position and personal relationship with Putin]

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<sup>67</sup> Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*, p.49

Having established the background of the GPM, as well as discussing some criticisms surrounding it, I will now turn to the components of such a model if it were used to analyze Russian foreign policy decision making. Whereas the RAM can be similarly applied to any given state by simply assuming said state to be a rational, unified actor, the GPM must be constructed separately for different states, using the components supplied by Allison. As mentioned earlier, these components are the actors, the factors that influence them, and the action channels they use to influence policymaking.

In regard to Russia, I find the actors to be the various factions within President Vladimir Putin's inner circle, as well as Putin himself. However, there is some disagreement among scholars as to the role of these actors within the decision making process. A key disagreement is to what extent the groups within the Kremlin can even be referred to as factions. Some scholars see these groups as having barely existing ties between 'members.'<sup>68</sup> For example, Renz argues that "the individuals concerned are too different to be treated as an analytical unity."<sup>69</sup> In this view, the only thing allowing people to be categorized as belonging to one faction versus another is a vague set of life experiences and background, rather than definitive group political views or social ties. Therefore, Renz refers to these groupings as 'coalescences,' rather than factions.

Other scholars refer to these groupings as 'clans,' indicating a higher degree of linkage between their members, and that "most decisions are still the result of compromises that are brokered between the interests of different clans."<sup>70</sup> In this view, there are active connections

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<sup>68</sup> Renz, Bettina. "Putin's Militocracy? An Alternative Interpretation of the Siloviki in Contemporary Russian Politics." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2006, 903-24.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p.922

<sup>70</sup> Gvosdev, Nikolas K., and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2014. p.50

between the members of each clan, and there is a stronger sense of a shared political vision or agenda.

Based on the informal network structure of Kremlin decision making that I will discuss shortly, this second view appears to be more applicable to Russian policymaking. Russia's network structure would not be able to function without factions to serve as channels of action and blocs of influence. Although I agree that the members of these factions are not necessarily in lock step when it comes to ideology and opinion, there is certainly a sense that they are bound together, especially in terms of how connections within the government are almost a prerequisite for employment/selection. In Putin's administration, this is a continuation from the Yeltsin years, where "personal links and loyalty were the predominant determinant for political appointments."<sup>71</sup> Putin inherited this system when he became president, and "lacking a ready-made political base of his own due to his short experience in federal politics, and not being able to resort to institutionalized channels of recruitment via parliament or political parties, he had no choice but to build his own power base on trusted individuals he had previously worked with."<sup>72</sup> Thus, the network system of government ensures that personal connections continue to bind officials together.

The strength of the cohesive bonds is not the only disagreement in the scholarly community surrounding the Kremlin's factions, however. Another disagreement relates to how many factions there truly are. One view argues that there are as many as ten different factions within the Kremlin structure,<sup>73</sup> while another argument claims that there are really only two

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<sup>71</sup> Renz, "Putin's Militocracy?", p.904

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.904-905

<sup>73</sup> Bremmer, Ian, and Samuel Charap. "The Siloviki in Putin's Russia: Who They Are and What They Want." *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2006).

major groupings.<sup>74</sup> Although it appears that there may be close to a dozen sub-factions grouped around various political and business leaders, “these groups are not well defined but are fluid in their membership and goals.”<sup>75</sup> For the purposes of categorizing actors for a Governmental Process Model analysis, it is more useful to side with the view of two major factions, especially considering a fairly broad scholarly consensus that these factions had stabilized into basically coherent groups by the end of Putin’s first administration. The next step is to identify these two factions.

The first faction is widely known as the siloviki. This faction is “composed of the security services group and its allies.”<sup>76</sup> This group is most often described as “a group of current and former intelligence officers from Putin’s hometown of St. Petersburg who wield immense power within the Kremlin and control key sectors of the Russian economy...”<sup>77</sup> However, this description can be a bit misleading. There are many people firmly in the siloviki camp who have never served in the armed forces or intelligence community. Bremmer and Charap, in a widely cited *Washington Quarterly* article in 2007, offer Sergei Bogdanchikov as such an example.

Although he was never employed within the force structures, the authors consider Bogdanchikov, as a result of his powerful position as president of Rosneft, to have been one of

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<sup>74</sup> Gvosdev, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 2014

<sup>75</sup> Ibid p.50

<sup>76</sup> Ibid p.51

<sup>77</sup> Bremmer, “The Siloviki in Putin’s Russia,” p.85

the “most powerful siloviki.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, the siloviki are “united more by outlook and interests than by background. The faction is best understood as an informal network of government officials and businessmen... who share similar political views, pursue a common policy agenda, and seek joint control over economic assets.”<sup>79</sup> This uniting outlook can best be described as statist identity vision for Russia.

The term ‘identity vision’ refers to historic visions of Russian international identity which are still influential today. This description is put forward by Tsygankov in his work *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*.<sup>80</sup> The Statist identity vision is connected with those who “have emphasized the state’s ability to govern and preserve the social and political order,” and have been “explicit in choosing values of power, stability, and sovereignty over those of freedom and democracy.”<sup>81</sup> This vision of Russia’s place in the international sphere champions Russia’s great power status.

The Statist view posits that “national interest in foreign policy should be defined in reference to the well-being of the state itself,” rather than abstract values like democracy or human rights.<sup>82</sup> Throughout Russia’s past, this view has been the most influential, and is today supported mainly by the siloviki. In recent years, this group appears to be ascendant, but, as I will illustrate later, there is disagreement over the extent to which Putin would allow any one

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid p.86

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia’s Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid p.5

<sup>82</sup> Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*. p.63



faction to become truly powerful. In addition, there is a second faction which stands to block the siloviki's predominance.

The liberal-technocrats form the second large faction and are, as their name suggests, an amalgam of liberals and technocrats. Bremmer and Charap argue, "the liberals...are defined by their shared approach to economic policy, which, although significantly more interventionist than Western liberalism, is more market friendly than the philosophies of their rivals. This group, generally comprised of economists and former businesspeople, is considered the weakest of the [factions]."<sup>83</sup> However, in many analyses, scholars often group the liberals together with the Technocrats.

The liberal-technocrat faction is generally influenced by a westernizing identity vision, a view of national character which has played an important role in Russia since the reign of Peter the Great. This vision of Russian identity "placed the emphasis on Russia's similarity with the West and viewed the west as the most viable and progressive civilization in the world."<sup>84</sup> These are mainly businessmen and economists without a great deal of influence in Putin's inner circle, although "the technocrats'...control of Gazprom, the state-controlled gas monopoly, gives [them] significant influence on all policy matters."<sup>85</sup> Although there may be disagreement between those who make up these two sub-factions, their similarity to one another, as compared to the siloviki, results in a common view of their classification as a single faction.

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<sup>83</sup> Bremmer, "The Siloviki in Putin's Russia," p.85

<sup>84</sup> Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia's Foreign Policy Change and Continuity in National Identity*, p.4

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

Left unanswered in the analyses of the factions and their worldviews, however, is what role the factions play in contemporary Russia. The true importance of these factions in the Russian government's decision making process is contested. Some authors argue that the rise of the siloviki is a conscious power-play by Putin. For example, in his article in the journal *Security Dialogue*, Nikolai Petrov argues that the growing number of siloviki in government constitutes "the insertion of police-state mechanisms into a delegative and declarative democratic state."<sup>86</sup> Such a proliferation of siloviki would help to further centralize Putin's power and influence in the Russian state, through his connections with influential siloviki within his inner circle. Examples include figures such as Igor Sechin (KGB veteran, former Deputy Prime Minister, and current head of Russian oil giant Rosneft), Sergei Ivanov (a Colonel General in Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service and current Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration), as well as the Minister of Defense and the director of the Federal Security Bureau (FSB).<sup>87</sup>

Others, such as Russian analysts Bobo Lo and Dmitri Trenin, caution against such a view. In *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, Lo and Trenin argue against what they term "facile speculation about the 'shadowy influences allegedly exerted by the siloviki...[as] such crude judgments underestimate the untidiness of the policy environment, notably the complex web of personal and bureaucratic interactions."<sup>88</sup> An attitude discounting any sort of official conspiracy to build up factional power is more widespread in the literature

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<sup>86</sup> Petrov, Nikolai. "Seven Faces of Putin's Russia: Federal Districts as the New Level of State—territorial Composition." *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 1 (2002): 73-91. p.73

<sup>87</sup> Kryzhtanovskaya, Olga, and Stephen White. "Inside the Putin Court: A Research Note." *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 7 (2005): 1065-075.

<sup>88</sup> Staun, Jorgen. "Siloviki versus Liberal-technocrats: The Fight for Russia and Its Foreign Policy." *Danish Institute for International Studies* 9 (2007). p.26

than views like Petrov's. However, no planned conspiracy is necessary for a widespread faction to influence policy, as it is exactly the aforementioned 'untidy' policy environment that gives factions their power. In this informal, network-driven sphere, the relationships afforded by factional 'membership' provide the players with influence.

Although there is certainly nothing like a 'membership card' for belonging to a faction, personal relationships are quite important. Focusing on the informal nature of Putin's regime, Alena Ledeneva writes, "Whereas 'modern' networks are relatively open and recruit independent agents on the basis of professional expertise, kin and social networks in Russia function in a 'pre-modern' way, on the basis of loyalty and compliance with the informal ways of getting things done."<sup>89</sup> This loyalty and compliance are what give the factions their degree of influence within the 'pre-modern,' informal systems of decision-making that occur within Putin's administrative regime.

The personal relationships that form within these networks have led to the distribution of factions within state enterprises and institutions. For example, "In all the key state companies the presence of siloviki is notable."<sup>90</sup> As mentioned previously, the presence of siloviki is not the result of any shadowy conspiracy, but rather due to the fact that personal relationships within the factions lead to those in power hiring like-minded, factionally equivalent associates.

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<sup>89</sup> Ledeneva, Alena. "Can Medvedev Change Sistema? Informal Networks And Public Administration In Russia". In *Russia As A Network State: What Works In Russia When State Institutions Do Not*, ed Vadim Kononenko, 1st ed. (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan). 2011, p.44

<sup>90</sup> Kryshatanovskaya, Olga, and Stephen White. 'The Formation of Russia's Network Directorate'. In *Russia As A Network State: what Works In Russia When State Institutions Do No*, ed Vadim Kononenko, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan). 2011, p.33

Thus, by analyzing the degree of factional influence on Putin's administration through, for example, considering the factional identity of those within Putin's inner circle, one may more accurately predict the direction in which Russian foreign policy is heading. Similarly, examining foreign policy inclination at given moments can be helpful in determining which faction is winning the struggle for greatest influence in the Kremlin during that timeframe. These two pieces feed into the creation of a GPM for contemporary Russia, and can assist in developing methods for better predicting future foreign policy vacillations.

It is also important to note that, because the GPM accounts for those factors which motivate the different personalities involved in decision making, the GPM does not necessarily exclude the security and respect concerns inherent in the RAM and HRM. Indeed, as discussed above, the influential siloviki faction takes security and reputation very seriously for the Russian state. The GPM attempts to predict how important such concerns are to the individuals in the decision making process, and considers them among other motivating factors, such as positional prestige or the gain of personal wealth. In Russia's case, as I will show below, the strong role of informal power dynamics makes positional prestige appear to be less of a factor than in states such as the United States. However, this same informal power structure increases the ability of key figures to obtain personal wealth through personal connections and business appointments.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the GPM builds upon the RAM and HRM by not taking specific interests such as security or honor for granted.

Having discussed the actors and their influences, I will now present an overview of the factors which allow factions to influence decision-making in Putin's government. In order to

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<sup>91</sup> For example, Igor Sechin's chairmanship of Rosneft thanks in part to his close relationship with Vladimir Putin.

conceptualize the channels through which factions influence foreign policy decision making, one must examine the structure of the Russian state in general. Richard Sakwa has advanced an argument that rather than functioning as a liberal constitutionalist state, Russia features spheres for both formal and informal decision making. In his book *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism and the Medvedev Succession*, Sakwa argues that in modern Russia, “a dual state has emerged in which the legal-normative system based on constitutional order is challenged by shadowy arbitrary arrangements, ... populated by various conflicting factions.”<sup>92</sup> This view of a network state functioning in parallel to, and often at odds with, the official constitutional order fits in well with Ledeneva’s arguments about the importance of personal, faction based relationships when it comes to decision making.

In further support of this view, Viktor Sheinis, one of the creators of Russia’s constitution, as quoted by Sakwa, has claimed that an integral part of the power structure under Putin is “the interaction of official and shadow structures. People form the president’s ‘inner circle,’ because of their personal ties, and gain influence that far exceeds the authority granted by law to their post.”<sup>93</sup> These comments illustrate how the Russian foreign policy process can be influenced by factional struggle: existing in a sphere of government not regulated by formal procedures, powerful men with personal ties to Putin, and varying identity visions for Russia’s place in the world, vie for policy influence.

In the literature, there appears to be a wide consensus agreeing with this conception of Putin’s government. Certainly, not every author views the situation in such a conspiratorial

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<sup>92</sup> Sakwa, Richard. *The Crisis of Russian Democracy: The Dual State, Factionalism, and the Medvedev Succession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p.viii

<sup>93</sup> Ibid p.86

light. Ledeneva, for example, sees this system as existing solely because there is no alternative. She contends that, if Putin were, for some reason, to abolish the informal network structure that the Russian government would come to a complete standstill, as it relies on these networks to get things done. In this view, it is a vicious circle, where formal governance is ineffective, and informal governance is thus necessary. Then, as a result, formal governance cannot develop because it is not 'in use.' Thus the cycle repeats itself.<sup>94</sup>

Regardless of how this dual system came to be, and why it remains in place, the end result is that Russian foreign policy decision making is especially susceptible to the pressure of factional struggle: because Putin was particularly successful "in centralizing the foreign policy decision-making process within the Kremlin," factions are able to strongly influence international relations decisions.<sup>95</sup> Their high degree of influence is in part because such policies are decided upon not in the Duma or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but inside Putin's inner circle, the very space where factions are most persuasive. If the factions are able to be influential because of their place within the dual state system, and the centralization of foreign policy into this place, the next piece to consider is the mechanism through which they actually attempt to guide foreign policy.

Returning to the two factions mentioned before, the Liberals and the Siloviki can influence different dimensions of foreign policy through virtue of their sector dominance. As Sakwa argues, "there was a broad division of labour between the two, with the liberal-

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<sup>94</sup> Ledeneva, Alena. 'Can Medvedev Change Sistema? Informal Networks And Public Administration In Russia'. In *Russia As A Network State: What Works In Russia When State Institutions Do Not*, 1st ed. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan. 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, p.56

technocrats predominant in economic and financial management, while the siloviki took responsibility for ‘strategic’ industries, the energy sector and defence policy.”<sup>96</sup> Influence on foreign policy follows from this division of labor, as the Liberals push for economic global interaction, while the Siloviki, although certainly not disinterested in profiting from foreign trade, are more occupied with security concerns.

It would follow that, when Liberals are ‘winning’ the factional struggle for influence, Russian foreign policy decisions pursue economic cooperation with the outside world, with a less vocal emphasis on, for example, protecting state sovereignty. On the other hand, when the Siloviki are at their most powerful, foreign policy seems to shift in the direction of confrontation, as a more defensive and militaristic worldview is at play. Thus, the GPM applied to Russia would consider the individuals at the top levels of leadership, and assume that they are able to create a strong web of influence due to the unique network structure of Putin’s administration.

The siloviki faction is of particular interest in regard to the Russo-Georgian War. Stephen Blank, in a 2011 report on civil-military relations in Russia, argues that those in the power structures staged Russia’s provocation of Georgia “in such a way as to compel President Dmitri Medvedev, the sole person capable of legally authorizing force, to go beyond his initial support for a peace enforcement cooperation confined to South Ossetia to invade Georgia and detach its rebellious provinces from it.”<sup>97</sup> To apply the GPM to this conflict, one must first consider the interests of the siloviki in embarking upon such an armed conflict with their neighbor. Certainly, based on the statist identity vision and personal backgrounds of many siloviki discussed in Chapter 2, these interests would likely include security and reputational concerns about Russia.

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<sup>96</sup> Sakwa, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy*, p.116

<sup>97</sup> Blank, Stephen. "Civil-Military Relations in Medvedev's Russia." Strategic Studies Institute. January 1, 2011. Accessed February 26, 2015. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub1038.pdf>. p.6

However, consideration of the personal interests present among this faction can add to the greater picture. In his article “The Siloviki in Charge,” published in *the Journal of Democracy* in 2009, Andrei Illarionov writes that “in addition to their internal psychological need to wage aggressive wars, a rational motive is also driving the *siloviki* to resort to conflict.”<sup>98</sup> Illarionov argues that the siloviki resort to external wars as a means to “distract domestic public opinion and destroy the remnants of political and intellectual opposition within Russia itself.”<sup>99</sup> Such action is beneficial to the siloviki, as their hold on power is dependent on the informal, undemocratic state system detailed earlier in this chapter.

Going further, however, we can consider deeper personal motives for some of those in the power structures to lobby for war. One example of the personal stake the siloviki had in South Ossetia comes from the US Ambassador to Georgia, John Tefft. In confidential cables from the mid-2000s, leaked in 2010, the ambassador reported that “Russia’s FSB spy agency directly controlled South Ossetia, with Russian FSB agents sitting in the government of rebel president Eduard Kokoity.”<sup>100</sup> The question then becomes, what interests do the siloviki have in this small enclave outside of Russia’s borders?

In her book *Putin’s Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*, Karen Dawisha presents a different narrative than the security or honor arguments about the war. She argues that South Ossetia can be seen as “a wholly owned subsidiary of mafia-siloviki structures in Russia, who use the

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<sup>98</sup> Illarionov, Andrei. “The Siloviki in Charge.” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 2 (2009): 69-72. p.72

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Harding, Luke. “WikiLeaks Cables Claim Russia Armed Georgian Separatists.” *The Guardian*. December 1, 2010. Accessed February 26, 2015.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/01/wikileaks-cables-russia-georgian-separatists>.



territory for offshore Russian counterfeiting and smuggling operations.”<sup>101</sup> In fact, the extent of siloviki presence in South Ossetia is such that *Moscow Times* journalist Yuliya Latynina (as quoted in Dawisha) has described South Ossetia as “a joint venture of siloviki generals and Ossetian bandits...”<sup>102</sup> However, following Saakashvili’s reelection in 2008, “he moved to stop Ossetia’s use as a center for these operations, which are said to include the massive counterfeiting of \$20 million in \$100 bills.”<sup>103</sup> The possibility of losing such a lucrative enterprise would provide compelling reasons for the siloviki to protect the enclave from Georgian control.

If Saakashvili had in fact regained some semblance of control over the region, he would have likely put a stop to such criminal enterprise as a way of currying favor with the United States, which was trying to fight the counterfeiting. Considering the Georgian perspective through the GPM, however, suggests that Georgia’s attempts to regain some control over the territories were not influenced solely by US pressure, or the security and honor concerns discussed earlier in this chapter. An additional explanation arises from a GPM analysis: administration survival. Whereas Russia’s inner circle of decision-makers appeared firmly entrenched in power thanks to extreme consolidation of power, Saakashvili’s administration was not as embedded.

This possibly fragile political state, combined with the fact that he ran for election on a platform which in part pledged to take action against separatist incitements, meant that Saakashvili and his administration “would be unable to survive on the domestic political scene, with its tradition of ‘street policy,’ if he did not put up a fight in the face of a Russian military

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<sup>101</sup> Dawisha, Karen. *Putin’s Kleptocracy : Who Owns Russia?* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. p.345

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

assault or other violent provocations from the north.”<sup>104</sup> As a result, Saakashvili and those in his government had strong incentive to respond toughly to the increased bombardments by South Ossetia in early August. When tensions began to rise, Saakashvili’s administration would have felt the need to act, as Mouritzen and Wivel argue in *Explaining Foreign Policy*:

Having originally committed himself to an offensive strategy vis-à-vis the two breakaway republics (internally displaced persons from these regions being a major political force in domestic politics), it would be too shameful if not even a defensive effort was made in the face of a concrete challenge from the north. [Saakashvili] would have to defend at least the Georgian villages in South Ossetia like Kurta, the ‘capital’ of the pro-Georgian part of South Ossetia. Moreover, the conquest of Tskhinvali would be a triumph vis-à-vis any domestic opponent.<sup>105</sup>

The GPM would not argue that personal interests such as maintaining power were the only reason the conflict occurred, but rather, when added to the security and honor concerns of those in the Kremlin inner circle or Saakashvili’s administration, the likelihood that conflict would transpire builds up quickly.

The GPM can account for all four assessment questions about the Russo-Georgian War. First, the model accounts for the use of force as a means of protecting siloviki interests in South Ossetia, both in terms of wealth and security. The GPM also accounts for the lack of a Russian advancement to Tbilisi or an overthrow of Saakashvili, as the army would only need to push

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<sup>104</sup> Mouritzen, *Explaining Foreign Policy*, p.70

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

Georgian troops far enough away from the separatist enclaves to ensure their continued autonomy/protection from Georgian interference, rather than trying to completely destroy Georgia's armed forces.

Additionally, by recognizing the enclave as independent, Russia can ensure its autonomous nature, and create a situation where Georgia will likely not attempt to retake the regions, as Russia would then argue that it has legal justification to protect the sovereignty of a neighboring independent country, and push back Georgia once again. This state of affairs protects FSB financial interests in the region, while simultaneously accomplishing the siloviki's statist security and honor goals of a non-NATO Georgia. Finally, the GPM also accounts for Georgia's decision to attack Tskhinvali. As mentioned above, Saakashvili's administration had strong domestic political reasons to react decisively to provocations from South Ossetian forces. A shortcoming of this model is that it is of course difficult to isolate when the tipping point will be reached. It would have been possible for Georgia to react militarily to any of the earlier incitements, but it took until August 7<sup>th</sup> for Saakashvili to give the attack order. Regardless, the GPM predicts that eventually Georgian action would have occurred, as a combination of the security and honor concerns listed throughout this chapter, as well as the concerns of administration survival detailed above.

Advantages of using this model in general are that it accounts for personal interests without discounting or denying concerns about security or reputation. By this I mean that the GPM can either strengthen or weaken predictions already made based on security or honor reasons. For example, in the case of the Russo-Georgian War, security and honor concerns align with personal interests of influential members of society, which strengthens the prediction of

Russian action. However, if personal interest would be hurt by action, the prediction for action would conversely be weakened. Additionally, the GPM accounts for the different decision making processes that occur in differently structured governments, as well as the wide degree of domestic politics that occur in different states or situations. The most significant disadvantage of the GPM remains that it requires significant amounts of information from an often very opaque system. Thus, the GPM may more often rely on speculation about circumstances than the RAM or HRM might. However, considering what goes on within the black box of decision making, even with limited information, is better than denying such processes occur. Having applied and assessed each of the three models, I will now consider their implications.

## **Implications**

The implications of these models lie mainly in the likelihood of future violence. By this I mean, if one considers Model X to be the ‘correct’ way of viewing Russia’s decision making process, what does the model predict are the prospects for continued conflict between Russia and other states? For each model, I will consider implications for the Near Abroad as well as for the West.

If one assumes the RAM to be accurate, future conflict between Russia and states in the Near Abroad is highly possible if they try to join NATO or the EU. The focus on security in this model means that Russia would not have a reason to react aggressively towards its neighbors unless they were acting in a way which Russia perceived as a security threat, even if said neighbors made other decisions which Russia did not like. Similarly, the RAM assumes that Russia’s hostilities with the West are a result primarily of the NATO expansion policy, but also of security competition in general.

The idea of a security competition between Russia and the West leads to another implication of this model: that regime change in Russia may ease the overt tone of hostility, but would not end the state of security competition which currently exists between Russia and the West. Even if Putin were overthrown and a truly democratic government was somehow installed, we would likely continue to see Russian insistence on a sphere of influence in the Near Abroad as a means of insuring security.

Similarly, although Russia is clearly seeking increased relations with China, the RAM would predict that such a partnership could only go so far before security concerns become a

problem. For example, Russian concerns about Chinese immigration and economic activity in Russia's resource-rich Far East will likely increase with time, despite whatever public relations may be broadcast between Beijing and Moscow. Thus, if China were to become a greater security concern to Russia than NATO currently poses, it is possible even an authoritarian Russia could seek greater engagement with the West at some future point, as a hedge against the growth of Chinese regional power.

Operating under the assumptions of the HRM, future conflict between Russia and the Near Abroad states is highly possible, even if a security component is not involved. In this view, Russia feels that it has privileged influence over the region, and can choose to insert its will into the dealings of the Near Abroad states. For example, if Russia felt that Kazakhstan was acting contrary to Russian interests, it would consider armed conflict as an acceptable, albeit final, option to bring the errant state back into line.

However, such military intervention does not occur spontaneously without warning. As with the case of Georgia, Russia will likely voice its displeasure and issue threats for months or years before taking military action. Also, non-military actions such as economic sanctions will occur well before troops roll in. Using the HRM as a guide, states such as the Baltics in today's world need not fear an immediate, unforeseeable Russian invasion. Although Russia has applied economic pressure to the Baltic States in recent years, such as the blocking of certain seafood imports and manipulation of energy pricing, these pressures are not on par with the threatening rhetoric Russian leaders used extensively in the lead up to the war with Georgia.

To an analyst following Russian-Baltic relations, it would be evident when such severe threats were being made, and what stage of the 'conflict playbook' Russia had reached, therefore giving a rough idea of how realistic an armed intervention might be. Thus, if Russia begins

publicly questioning Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania's right to statehood, or Russian generals start giving press conferences about using military steps to insure Russian interests in those states, the likelihood of conflict would be quite high.

For Western states dealing with Russia, the HRM implies that cooperation can be improved through increased consultation. As an example, for the best possibility of success in securing Russian cooperation on global issues like the conflict in Syria, Russia's position in institutions such as the United Nations Security Council should not be taken for granted or viewed as an obstruction. Rather, Russia should be consulted and courted. If Russia does not feel that it is being taken seriously, it is likely to adopt a more antagonistic stance. On the other hand, if Russia feels treated as an equal partner, it will be more likely to negotiate a more agreeable compromise.

Another implication of the HRM is that there is not necessarily a zero-sum security competition between Russia and the West. In the view of this model, if the Putin regime were to be somehow overthrown, it would be possible for Russia to join the liberal democratic institutions of Europe without the hesitations of security concerns, provided that such institutions courted Russia as a sought after potential member, rather than adopting a stance of being benevolent to Russia by letting it join. Conversely, if an authoritarian regime does remain in power, the HRM would predict that relations with China could grow even stronger, as China shares common authoritarian values.

Finally, the GPM would predict future conflict where siloviki interests are threatened. In practice, this would likely mean Gazprom or Rosneft profits/supply routes being threatened, as many in the leadership structures of these companies are in the siloviki faction. In addition to personal interests, the Statist identity vision of the siloviki in the Kremlin would predict future

action to protect the existence of the Putin regime. By this I mean that democratic revolutions in the Near Abroad are seen not just as a nuisance to Russian influence, but also as a dangerous wildfire that might spread to Russia if it is not tamped down. There is certainly some sense of the fear that revolution might spread in Russia's response to the Ukraine crisis, and would be foreseeable in response to such a revolution in other Near Abroad states. For example, if the Belarusian opposition were able to create an electoral revolution, it is likely Russian troops would quickly put an end to it, probably under the guise of protecting Russian citizens within Belarus from ethnic violence.

For the West, the GPM implies the possibility of both cooperation and conflict. Siloviki coffers are filled when Russian gas exports flow smoothly, so cooperation with energy hungry states such as Germany is more likely than cooperation with a country like the United States, with which Russia does not have as many business dealings. From the point of view of the GPM, regime change in Russia might drastically increase the possibility of future cooperation. It would depend on to what extent a new Russian government were able to create a fully functioning formal governmental structure, as opposed to the informal dual state model which enables the siloviki to disproportionately influence the decision making process. If a new government was not able to undertake such a task, then the current channels would likely remain in place, even with a new leader, and not much would change.



## **Conclusion**

In the case of these three models, the GPM appears to be the most widely applicable, because the GPM can work so differently for different states and situations. Depending on the institutional makeup of the state in question, the GPM will lead to quite diverse conclusions, while still operating on the same initial assumptions and questions. Another important feature of the GPM is that it does not take specific motivations for granted, such as security in the RAM and honor/respect in the HRM. By considering the identities of the players in the political competitions, the factors which influence their personal stands on the issues, and what channels they are capable of influencing decision making through, the GPM is the most widely applicable.

In terms of explaining the Russo-Georgian War, both the GPM and HRM successfully predict the course of events, in terms of the three questions used to assess each model in Chapter 3. However, because the GPM would still consider the same honor motivations of the HRM without discounting the security or personal interests of the decision makers, the GPM is the most useful. However, the assessment of these models goes beyond their frameworks, and can extend to the theoretical traditions which influenced their design.

The diverse implications of these models demonstrate the importance of understanding what kind of lens one is using when evaluating an event such as the Russo-Georgian War. Given the same set of historical conditions and starting circumstances, the inspiration of dissimilar theoretical approaches to International Relations analysis, in the three models, can lead to quite different predictions, as well as very different assumptions about future events. By considering a diverse spectrum of International Relations theory, one can be sure to cover such varied

possibilities when examining a situation. Using models inspired by the different theories of realism, constructivism, and liberalism also illuminates some of the benefits and shortcomings of thinking in the mindset of each theoretical tradition.

For example, although there are certainly some global events which could be successfully analyzed from a realist perspective, the shortcomings of the RAM when considering a conflict like the Russo-Georgian War hint at general issues with analyzing situations from a realist perspective. The relationship between Russian and Georgia is so fraught with historical and cultural entanglements, stretching back to the mid-1700s, that the security focus of the RAM is not as effective. This long, complicated history creates fertile ground for the successful application of a constructivist perspective, an assertion which is strengthened by the how successful the HRM is at accounting for the various questions that arise from the 2008 war.

Applying the GPM reveals just how useful Moravcsik's theory of liberalism can be for viewing world events. This perspective gives great importance to domestic politics, as, in this view, it is not the state that is most fundamental, but rather those individuals and groups which configure the state's preferences. And as the GPM demonstrated, the preferences of those individuals within a state's decision making sphere can help provide further evidence for why certain decisions have been made.

To return to the contemporary conflict in Ukraine which I mentioned in the introduction: has using these models for the Russo-Georgian War shed any light on the current conflict? I would argue yes. Both Georgia and Ukraine are Russia's post-Soviet neighbors, with extensive historical, cultural, and economic ties to Russia. In the case of Georgia, the extensive nature of these ties demonstrated that the RAM is too limited to fully explain the hostilities with Russia. Rather, concerns of honor certainly played a role as well, and the personal gain of those in the

security services only served to strengthen the likelihood that Russia would choose to act militarily.

Similarly, Ukraine's extensive ties with Russia would predict a similar line of reasoning for Russia's decision making following the Euromaidan protests and Yanukovych's ouster. The results of applying the three models to Georgia provide convincing evidence that a standard realist argument is not the best explanation for the current Ukraine conflict. Similarly, the results would suggest that the Ukraine conflict is not solely the result of feeling slighted by Ukraine's shift towards the West, and cannot be fully understood through a constructivist approach. Rather, similar to the Russo-Georgian War, a liberalist perspective, and the GPM which it inspires, can likely go furthest to explaining Russia's actions vis-à-vis Ukraine.

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